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Television Technology and Moral Literacy

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Center for the Study of Ethics in Society



TELEVISION TECHNOLOGY AND MORAL LITERACY

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**TELEVISION TECHNOLOGY
AND
MORAL LITERACY**

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University Illinois-Urbana**

**Presented to the WMU Center for the Study
of Ethics in Society
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The old Europe broke apart during the nineteenth century. Mass democracy and industrialism were the two revolutions that gave the final blow. Together they reversed the direction of Western society--on the Continent and here in North America as well.

Mass democracy in France: Let the blood flow; change even the names of the streets. The upheaval was so devastating that it rivaled in emotion the fall of Rome. No longer divine rights for a few. Make the people supreme. In fact, the starkly unique idea cut like a red hot plowshare through nineteenth century soil. And the aftermath continues to boil in Eastern Europe yet today.

Industrialism: Karl Marx from London's British Museum saw factories and coal mines cripple children and fatten the elite. Industrialization in the United States, its rails and telegraph binding up the continent. Steel. The assembly line. Industry's potentates--Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford.

Two dramatic events begun in a previous time--mass democracy and industrialism--shifted the course of history. And in this very hour, another revolution equal in power is reshaping the social contours. We are experiencing a cultural metamorphosis comparable in importance to the

massified democracy and scientific industry initiated one century ago. And how shall we label this contemporary phenomenon: Post-industrialism? A communications revolution? The information age? Telematics? A paperless society?

Kevin Philips speaks of "mediacracy"--not rule by the demos, the people, democracy, but rule by the media. In 1810, the United States invested 61 percent of its national income in agriculture and nine percent in manufacturing. You know the story well. By World War II manufacturing dominated as the chief segment of our economy. But we are in a post-industrial phase at present. The decline in manufacturing percentage is as sharp since the 1950s as at any period in agriculture--now at 21% of our GNP. Increasingly North America is shifting away from manufactured products and physical labor to services and information--precisely at a time that it is competing with the manufacturing power of Japan.

The majority of our national income presently involves the creation and distribution of knowledge. Massive media empires have arisen, communication industries such as Xerox, I. B. M., A.T.&T., Time Warner, J. Walter Thompson. The old economic equations are undergoing a quantum shift. America's new mandarins do not sell industrial

goods, but control an economy of ideas and information. More and more, modern scholarship turns to the lynchpin of post-industrialism--the communications revolution. We sense the same awesome consequences as nineteenth century intellectuals detected in theirs.

But the issue is still not focused precisely. Unique to our own day is global technology, technology on a worldwide scale, the two most decisive of which are in fundamental contradiction. Information technologies have created networks that potentially involve us all in each other's business. But their opposite, military technologies, threaten the human race with annihilation.

1945. Nuclear weapons, in principle able to totalize the planet. 1957. Sputnik, but not merely a satellite fired from the U.S.S.R. in secret; the whole world was watching. As the late Marshall McLuhan noted, humankind was bound together for the first time and it was done electronically.

1945. 1957. Then November 1963. We participated on that date as one world in President Kennedy's funeral. Television, radio, and satellites gathered us around his casket with all the emotion and ceremony of every burial. The parade down Pennsylvania avenue occurred on Mainstreet the

World.

And since these heady days, we have loaded the skies with satellites of information and those for military surveillance. Era number three--global technology in counterpoint. As we increase information, we presume, we facilitate understanding. And when we successfully curb the nuclear arms race, we put these two technologies on the proper trajectory. The one recedes as the other expands. Open information unfettered internationally and destructive technology restrained politically--that at least is our working formula for sustaining the globe at this auspicious moment of human history.

We confront a powerful dialectic. The electronic age is not just arising in splendid isolation. The complexities have never been greater. And increasingly we grasp them visually. The visual mind seizes not the minute parts but the story as an organic whole. These image events the viewer wholistically connects to the underlying meaning. Traffic lights are not mistaken for Christmas decorations and audiences know that cowboys in white hats are the "good guys".

Generations are emerging at present which might not be print literate, but are visually so. Imagine I had a million dollars -- a stack in my hand of 100

dollar bills four inches high. That is a visual statement. A friend of mine describes his adolescent days as a photograph out of focus. That's visual imagery. Human cognition can be viewed as a cycle of dawn and dusk -- creation and reflection. Or from the poet: "The human heart is a small town where people live." Visual thinking. And Ecclesiastes 12: "Before the silver cord snaps, and the golden bowl is broken at the cistern." The technological artifice which is our modern home creates complexities of an extraordinary sort. And meanwhile, relentlessly, the tide begins turning toward electronic communication. Visual messages in a visual age, now only dimly understood.

I personally believe in the power of visual literacy, but at least I understand the nagging worry of Neil Postman's Amusing Ourselves to Death, for example, and Jacques Ellul's The Humiliation of the Word :- book length arguments that sophisticated civilizations can only be founded on discriminating media such as print. In 1989, 1.1 billion books were checked out of libraries, but 1.2 billion videos were rented. 25 million Americans are functionally illiterate. For Ellul and Postman, these statistics are not neutral facts but telling social indicators.

Let me illustrate what I mean from Ellul. Using a

correspondence notion of truth, he writes:

No longer are we surrounded by fields, woods, and rivers, but by signs, signals, billboards, screens, labels and trademarks: this is our universe. And when the screen shows us a living reality -- such as people's faces or other countries -- this is still a fiction: it is a constructed and recombined reality.... It produces acute suffering and panic; a person cannot be deprived of truth and situated in fiction (Humiliation of the Word, p. 228).

Now that electronic forms of communication have multiplied dramatically and create an environment of images, Ellul and Postman believe we have lost our sense of truthfulness altogether. Apparently word forms of communication are less ambiguous and feed precise thinking rather than allowing visual impressions to dance in anarchy around our mind.

The history of communication scholarship convinces me that Postman and Ellul are reductionistic, draw erroneous conclusions about fiction and reality, and fail to grasp the nature of mediated language. Their crabbed tone at least indicates the seriousness of our current shift from print to visual technology. But rather than issue tedious ultimatums on television's part in our modern malaise, I believe our task centers on enabling this

medium to become aesthetically superior. And assisting television art in becoming a distinctive symbolic form requires some agreement about culture and that cultural activity called technology.

Philosophy of Culture

Without a philosophy of culture we stand empty-handed regarding this watershed in history. The media are agents of acculturation, and to the degree we understand culture we know communication as well. A philosophy of culture is the north star by which we set our intellectual compass as we enter the visual age. Culture is a human creative achievement distinct from nature. And communication is the connective tissue in culture-building. Symbols are the catalytic agent, the driving force in cultural formation. Jacob Bronowski tells the story of the Sherpas in his spectacular book, Science and Human Values (pp. 29-31). The Sherpas know intimately the face of Mount Everest seen from their home valley. When shown another side by Western climbers, they refuse at first to believe. How could it possibly be the same mountain from a different angle? But they are moved emotionally and their disbelief turns to amazement at the revelation that their time-worn mountain can open to them in a new

way. Students of communications can enjoy the Sherpas experience themselves by seeing the mass media from the conceptual apparatus of culture. Without a philosophy of culture there is no theory of technology. While the mass media are cultural institutions, the mass communication system is technological in character; therefore, we need a theory of technology in order to construct a normative framework for articulating the direction media technologies ought to proceed if they are not to be anti-cultural.

While I consider Ellul's diatribe against visual technology to be seriously misguided, his general theory of technology embedded in culture I find illuminating. For Ellul, technology is to 20th-century culture what capital was in Marx's interpretation of the 19th century. That does not mean that technology has the same function as capital or that the capitalist system is a thing of the past. It still exists, but capital no longer fulfills the role Marx claimed for it. Whereas work creates value for Marx, in extremely technological societies the determining factor is la technique. This generates value now and is not peculiar to capitalism. The characters have changed. We can no longer divide society into capitalists and workers; the phenomenon is

completely different and more abstract. We now have technological organizations on one side and all humanity on the other -- the former driven by necessity, and human beings demanding freedom. Ellul concludes that we must read the world in which we live, not in terms of capitalist structures, but in terms of technology.

From Ellul's perspective, a technological civilization has emerged in the late twentieth century. Technology is not merely one more arena for philosophers and sociologists to investigate, but a new foundation for understanding the self, human institutions, and ultimate reality. A society is technological, Ellul argues, not because of its machines, but from the pursuit of efficient techniques in every area of human endeavor. Unlike previous eras where techniques and technologies existed but did not dominate, the pervasiveness of modern techniques reorganize society in conformity with efficiency. Mechanistic techniques are applied not just to nature, but to social organizations and our understanding of personhood. Communications media represent the meaning-edge of the technological system. Information technologies thus incarnate the properties of technology while serving as the agent for interpreting the meaning of the very

phenomenon they embody. All artifacts communicate meaning in an important sense, but media instruments carry that role exclusively. Thus, as the media sketch out our world for us, organize our conversations, determine our decisions, and influence our self-identity, they do so with a technological cadence, massaging in our soul a technological rhythm and predisposition.

I am proposing the thesis that the history of communications technology is central to the history of civilization, that social change results from media transformations, that changes in communicative forms alter the structure of consciousness. No technologies are neutral; books, satellite, radio, and cinema are value-laden instruments with profound cultural impact.

Let me sketch how I believe this general framework proceeds. And for the sake of focus at the expense of breadth, let me concentrate on television -- the centerpiece of today's visual revolution.

Television's Properties

The first challenge is to identify television's distinguishing properties as a technology. As a physicist steps inside the world of atoms, matter,

and motion to understand them from within, so the informed mind, regarding television, must work deeply into its technological and dramatic features in order to know them fundamentally and distinctly as television's own.

This investigation is not as simplistic as we may assume. If one turns to standard aesthetics, most of the principles there are based on solid materials. We need for television a complex of defining ideas geared to electrical energy. With television we confront peculiar pulsations of brightness and shade, vibrations of sound and light which die away even as they come into being.

If we turn to media studies, we tend to view television in terms of its siblings, film and radio, and call it picture radio or home movies. We give television names such as "cinema made private," or see it as a bland version of theatre film. TV grew out of the womb of radio; television was poured into radio's old frames of reference and network patterns. But this close connection ought not beguile us into wasteful misunderstandings such as picture sound, small-screen film, or electronic book. Admittedly, four decades are a scant period for coming to terms with television's character, but it retains to this day a peculiar rootlessness born of our reluctance to take it

seriously as a communications technology in its own right.

Every medium has its own aesthetic grammar, that is, the elements enabling it to communicate. And two properties of television are intimacy and visual immediacy -- that is, depth vis-a-vis private space and simultaneity regarding time.

Intimacy. Television provides a fresh capacity for the penetration of character not available as explicitly to other media. The foreground becomes the critical element. The iconography of rooms is far more determinative of television than exterior location. Expansiveness is inappropriate and no more than three or four actors can appear on the screen at once. Thus "Bonanza" centered its plot around the ranch kitchen rather than the open prairie. The constraints of the screen's boundaries, as it were, force producers to develop the drama by concentrating it in the faces of the characters and entrusting them to unfold the complexity, beauty, and the depth of the human personality. Camera distance is defined by the actor's size and movements.

Television's essential artistic resource is the actor's performance, as evident in the way the "Cosby" show succeeds. Far more decisively than

movie-actors, the television-actor controls the meaning. Television's visual scale grants an intimacy unavailable elsewhere and thereby demands a believable performance. Vivid and highly professional acting over the history of TV accounts for nearly all those series most highly rated for quality -- "Route 66," "Gunsmoke," "Twilight Zone," "Cade's County," "The Name of the Game," and "Mary Tyler Moore," for example.

The second property peculiar to TV is visual immediacy. The lavish moments in television programming have been live transmissions -- the Kennedy assassination and funeral, the 1968 Democratic convention, Vietnam, the moonwalk, the Olympics. To a degree no other instrument can match, television captures immediacy and eventfulness; its representations coincide with the time of origination. Television made the land mines in Vietnam explode in our own back yard.

Television is an immediate communication mode; the time of creation is simultaneous with the time of showing. The time element is the same for the director as it is for the spectator. Television broadcasters realize there is no later stage at which they can change the story line. In other words, one difference with cinema is the immediate,

spontaneous and topical nature of televised communication. TV enables us to participate, as it were, in events as they occur. Television gives viewers the gift of ubiquity. And the unpredictability and roughness, which are the spice of events as they unfold, give great television an incomparable interest. Aesthetically mature television exhibits these qualities and attracts viewers by the immediacy of the picture.

Intimacy, immediacy, and I would add immanence. Television shares this third feature with the visual media generally. In a culture of immanence, life becomes located within the universe we see and hear, and not in some referent beyond immediate experience.

Television, cinema, and photography are key factors in maintaining a sensate worldview. They promote a closed, non-transcendent universe where an upper story does not exist. Television art is largely a series of variations on a windowless materiality. Thus critics typically insist that film and videotape are hospitable only to realism. By immersing us in life's action and color, visual media are usually thought intractable to the supernatural.

Television's constraints it shares with other photographic media. Television's picture-making is

not based on synthesis but reduction. The difference with painting, for example, is fundamental. Paintings are constructed; but pictures are taken. As Picasso explains it, the photographer resembles a surgeon who operates directly on the tissues of reality. The painter's image is total; he or she creates in a useful sense of the term. But the photographer penetrates through to some detail and concentrates there.

These examples of television's technological properties illustrate how a culture-embedded philosophy of technology operates. On this basis, each medium can be enabled to reach the limits of its symbolic capacity. The human community fulfills its unique creative capacity by establishing communication technologies as art forms appropriately their own. If a medium's expressive scope is maximized we will be subduing it for redemptive ends.

Expressive scope is a key term. In ballet, one primary way of judging performance is whether the dancers use the entire stage. I employ that as an analog. We should aim to discover strategies for using creatively the full stage provided by each communication technology. Television, along with film and radio, are the only new art forms

contributed by the 20th century West. In terms of inculcating social values, television is the dominant medium. It provides a common body of symbols which makes our public life possible. Therefore, it is particularly important for this vehicle of communication to enhance the symbolic theatre in which we live.

Moral Literacy

What are the implications for television's culture-forming task, normatively understood? How should we proscribe its mission?

Redemptive television articulates the moral order. Mass communication technologies ought to engender moral literacy; to the extent television stimulates the moral imagination, it fulfills a transformative purpose. We have heard this language in a sanitized sense: "Do these programs have any redeeming social value?" To be a symbolically mature art form, television ought to enable us to rearrange our moral landscape.

Neo-Marxists speak of the dominant reading which serves the ideological interests of the socio-economic elite. The media ordinarily engage in language practices which legitimize existing structures of power. Using these terms, television

as a redemptive medium ought to communicate alternative discourses, to offer a subversive text, to struggle against continuities and consensus. At that epiphanal moment when the taken-for-granted world is made problematic and the moral contours illuminated, this medium serves as a signifier of the moral order.

Technological culture by definition is an amoral environment. Our values are then measured in terms of technique, efficiency, the mystique of machineness. Moral norms are thus precluded, since efficiency values and judgments about rightness or wrongness are mutually exclusive. La technique acts tyrannically as a spiritual guillotine, decapitating other values and thus depriving them of cultural power. A civilization engrossed in means eliminates all moral obstructions to its ascendancy, as "in ancient days people put out the eyes of nightingales in order to make them sing better" (Ellul, Presence of the Kingdom, p. 75). La technique so characterizes contemporary life that moral judgment lays ruined within it. A meansified civilization converges on itself so relentlessly that, in principle, all necessities for moral decision-making are obviated; an alternative center of interest is congenitally inconceivable. Ellul foresaw already in

1948 that as the world of technics expands, our concerns will increasingly reduce to cost and time effectiveness, to administrative niceties, and become devoid of the moral dimension.

In that climate, the rationale for privileging moral literacy as television's mission ought to be obvious. Assuming that culture is the container of the human symbolic capacity, the constituent parts of such containers are a society's values. As ordering relations, values direct the ends of social practice and provide implicit standards for selecting courses of action. With standards recognized as inherent in the concept of symbolic environments, indicating what authentic existence involves is of premier importance, theoretically speaking. As a sign of our distinctive humanness, we create symbolic patterns along the boundaries between moral norms and actual behavior, the deepest self and our roles, the intentional and the inevitable. These constructs are the moral code which plays a role in human life comparable to that of instinct in the lower organisms. As instinct keeps animals on target, so moral codes orient human beings. Freedom from instinct constitutes the ground for our radical inner freedom, the liberation of the human will.

If we read the post-modernist, Jacques Derrida,

as a warning rather than accomplished fact, the self and public life may come to exist only in the text. Our humanity faces the threat of surviving merely in our language and even when we seek it there, it is gone. Therefore, in mass-mediated cultures aligned toward normlessness and illusive centers of textuality, our prophetic task is calling that mass communication technology known as television to its appropriate role in opening windows on the moral landscape.

Glimmers of hope appear at times. Wherever one observes reenactments of purposeful history and justice, there one sees the results of moral literacy. Video news can be considered redemptive when it serves as an instrument not of accommodation but of critique and social change. Documentaries, commentators, and public broadcasting often resonate with a redemptive accent, stir the human conscience, and liberate their viewers from the dominant text.

The close observer certainly celebrates the achievements. Over mass media history one can see a redemptive glow on occasion which encourages us regarding television technology today. We all know of stations and reporters who have refused the arrogance of power and sought to awaken the public

conscience with the vigor of Jeremiah. Pulitzer prizes are still awarded, by and large, to professionals who distinguish themselves for community service and who shun careerism and mega-dollars. When Chet Huntley retired from NBC news, he recalled his proudest moments--and rightly so--as NBC's crusade for the Latino migrants in the groves of Florida. The "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" and National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered" frequently engender moral literacy by probing deeply into events. Ted Koppel's "Nightline" and the ethnic press often provide a subversive reading. In January 1984, Time's photo-essay of the pope's visit to his would-be assassin is redemptive as well. "A Pardon from the Pontiff" it was called, "Lesson in Forgiveness for a Troubled World." In this lead news story, Lance Morrow quoted biblical teaching on forgiveness, probed the psychological impact of the pope's highly-publicized encounter, and then concluded with a redemptive accent:

Forgiveness is not an impulse much in favor. The prevalent style in the world runs more to the hard, cold eye of the avenger. Forgiveness does not look much like a tool for survival in a bad world. But that is what it is.

These are redemptive renditions, communicating

truth in a public medium that cuts away the commonplaces and engages the affective roots of human personality.

But, obviously, we can be aided in moral literacy through entertainment as much as through news and public affairs. Woody Allen's "Manhattan," Antonioni's "Blow-Up," Fellini and Bergman often penetrate to our ultimate values. The classics "Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner," "Charly," and "The Silence" explore the crannies deep within the human spirit. National Geographic's "Incredible Machine" sounds a redeeming note as it celebrates the wonder and polyphony of life. "Chariots of Fire," Horton Foote's "Tender Mercies," and "Ordinary People" offer a healing voice without being Pollyanish.

The history of communications, I am suggesting, indicates that popular culture need not be anti-normative per se. But let me restate the problem: How can television as artistic form engender moral literacy? Or more precisely: How can each of television's defining features--intimacy, immediacy, and immanence--be shaped in ethically appropriate ways? How can we wrest television from its inadequate professional norms--that is, objectivity for news and realism for entertainment?

First, redemptive intimacy. Television technology has a peculiar capacity to penetrate human character. We can begin probing television art by asking how our mysterious intimacy is portrayed. Television generally creates no strong and complicated people. Struggles of the human conscience are underdeveloped. While a few action shows, for example, demonstrate self-restraint and moral sensitivity, most prefer hyped-up violence without a hint of normative reflection.

Television redeems its peculiar capacity for intimacy when it seriously wrestles with our humanness, when the small screen opens an outsized window on credible people. *M*A*S*H* raised occasionally the permanent questions about life's logic and God's involvement. Compared to "Dragnet," "Cagney and Lacey" has been a progressive text, probing issues about authority, punishment, and patriarchy that the earliest shows in this genre never confronted. "Hill Street Blues," until it waned toward predictability in its later years, made forgiveness integral to the storyline and developed a fascinating texture of human relationships. A medium taking humanity seriously provides a significant counterforce in our fragmented age. Yet television's magnificent potential for

illuminating the human condition remains largely undeveloped to date.

Second, redemptive intimacy. What view of history emerges from television? Television technology makes the living moment brilliant; but, to be redemptive, the vividly immediate cannot contradict the tempo of purposive history. With the exception of soap operas, occasional miniseries, or movies-made-for-television, each episode is artificially selfcontained. "Little House on the Prairie", and "The Waltons" rested somewhere in a historical period, yet their structural pattern was an enclosed hour and not the perplexing arena of space-time history. Television tends to insulate audiences from history. Its momentary flashes and kamikaze dives into our temporality do not register moral sensitivity.

You undoubtedly remember NBC's docudrama, "Holocaust"--it re-enacted an historic event through the story of two German families from 1935 to 1945. The enormous complexity of the moral issues was trivialized somewhat, but "Holocaust" raised the consciousness of millions by embedding anti-Semitism within the flow of history. "Roots" also combined historical circumstances with dramatic intensity, in spite of predictable plots and

stereotyped characters. "The Day After" nudged its 70 million viewers away from hysteria or indifference, and thus toward heightened moral awareness.

Perhaps you have seen the exceptional non-narrative film, "Koyaanisqatsi" -- Koyaanisqatsi, the Hopi Indian word for life out of balance, life so in turmoil that a new beginning is imperative. "Koyaanisqatsi" is evidence that a visual message can illuminate history. For one hour and ten minutes, there are only two elements--striking images and musical rhythms--and they rivet our attention on human life out of sorts with the natural world. There is no spoken word, no characters, no story--only breathtaking pictures of earth, clouds, water, swirls of desert sand accompanied by swirls of music and white rock mountains made mysterious by stately orchestration. The natural world is cut against frenzied human culture. The Great Spirit's creation is at odds with ours. Stunning rock fountains of the mighty Southwest in eerie contrast to abandoned public high rise buildings--God's pure sky giving way to clouds of soot, the serenity of Zion National Park juxtaposed to the harried freeways of modern culture.

Our mind and psyche are churning from

"Koyaanisqatsi's" communicative power, and we are pushed far beyond sterile cliches. Our conscience is engaged. The history of human progress is critiqued. We are left struggling with our common stewardship of creation. The natural order and human order and moral order are integrated.

Redemptive intimacy, redemptive history, and third, transcendence. Television--as with other visual media--I have suggested, does not easily communicate the non-material. It tends to equate truth with immediate sensory impressions and remove mystery from life.

Some television asserts self-transcendence, but that is not what I mean. "The Incredible Hulk," "The Six Million Dollar Man" and "Wonder Woman" demonstrate self-transcendence but that is naturalistic ideology. The original "Superman," "Planet of the Apes," "Buck Rogers in the 25th Century," "Battleship Galactica" and "The Night Stalker" presume that humans may control their environment through technological creativity, but they do not verify a reality alongside space and time.

Mysteries such as "Star Trek," "Twilight Zone," "Space 1999," "Project UFO," and "Mission Impossible" are really a game, a way of moving outside the ordinary through dreams, fantasy, and

musical ecstasy. They puzzle and intrigue for the moment, but do not finally require antecedents outside the spatial and temporal. In spite of these forays into self-transcendence, television entertainment remains firmly anchored in non-transcendence. What Levi-Strauss calls the narrative's deep structure is fundamentally sensate. However, to be redemptive, video art must express genuine transcendence. By appropriate symbols, we ought to be nudged toward the invisible itself. United Artists' video, "Lord of the Rings," is one sign of progress.

Mary Tyler Moore's ABC special, "The Incredible Dream," represents an ambitious attempt to stretch television beyond the edge of finite sensibility. British innovator Jack Good makes an impressive attempt to knit together honestly humankind's history. The judgment phase stands out decisively also: dark skies, the human species driven from paradise, Sodom and Gomorrah, the flood, mushroom clouds, and a ponderous narration: "All flesh was corrupted." But a transcendent allusion appears prominently, too. I am not referring to Mary's appearance in heaven -- complete with white tie and tails, leading a tap-dancing chorus in "Hallelujah." Nor do I mean that

powerful scene where she sings before a stained glass window, her arms outstretched as in crucifixion. Both scenes hint at an independent scene of action beyond the immediate, but neither illuminates transcendence as powerfully as the hand emerging from that ancient source of all life, the sea. Fashioned as though from foam rubber, the white hand wafts Ben Vereen, Moore, and the Manhattan Transfer to shore while Mary sings, "Morning Has Broken." That is redemptive video, transcendence with artistic credibility.

Notice the sophistication of "The Elephant Man." It wrestles with that immense theme, the apparent arbitrariness of life, its seeming unreason against our yearning for an explanation. John Merrick, the world's ugliest man, died at age 27 in 1890. In this historical setting, the "Elephant Man" is a tale of redemption. Merrick's monstrous, repulsive deformity cannot crush a heart of gold and the delicate humanity underneath. "The Elephant Man" introduces the transcendental as powerful drama -- in Merrick's astonishing recitation of Psalm 23 after weeks of painstaking effort in which he could scarcely mimic his name. His boyish prayers as he lays down to sleep for the last time demonstrate a beckoning for Merrick beyond that night itself when

he chokes to death. Note also the episode in which Dr. Treeves takes John Merrick home for tea. The scene is loaded with transcendental symbols--the prominent cross in the living room window, the rare statuary in the corner, Mrs. Treeves' tears from a pure humanity and universal womanhood, the majestic spires of St. Philip's cathedral across the street. "The Elephant Man" resists moral chaos by addressing the human fear of capricious suffering; it gives the tragic what Aristotle calls, "proper purgation" or catharsis.

Conclusion

Along these lines we redeem television as a instrument of cultural formation. Building on its unique technological capacity, we transform intimacy into redemptive humanness, immediacy into purposeful history, and immanent realism into the transcendental. In so doing we empower television to become a transformer of culture by appealing to our conscience. Popular art that enhances moral literacy plays a vital part in developing a public philosophy. Television technology can be a vital resource in an age drifting along the streams of time.

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BIOGRAPHY

Clifford G. Christians is a Research Professor of Communications at the University of Illinois-Urbana, where he directs the doctoral program in communications and heads the media studies unit. He has written Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning (3rd ed.) with K. Rotzoll and M. Fackler, and coauthored Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays with Jay Van Hook.

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Should I (Legally) Be My Brother's Keeper?

Gilbert Geis

Univ. of Cal., Irvine

VOLUME III

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Surrogate Parenting: The Michigan Legislation

Lucille Taylor, Majority Counsel

Michigan State Senate

Paul Denenfeld, Legal Director

ACLU Fund of Michigan

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Morality Versus Slogans

Bernard Gert

Dartmouth College

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Martin Benjamin

Michigan State University

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Women's Dilemma: Is It Reasonable To Be Rational?

Harriet Baber

University of San Diego

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Higher-Order Discrimination

Adrian M. S. Piper

Wellesley College

FALL 1990 PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

- Sept 11* **Deni Elliot**, Institute for the Study of
Applied and Professional
Ethics, Dartmouth College
**DECEPTION:
TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES?**
Tuesday, 8:00 p.m., 2750 Knauss
- Sept 28* **Roger Ulrich**, Department of
Psychology, WMU
**ETHICS IN ACADEME?...
AND OTHER PREDICAMENTS**
*Friday, 3:00 -5:00 p.m.
3020 Friedman*
- Nov 1* **Edmund D. Pelligrino, M. D.**
Center for the Advanced Study of Ethics
Georgetown University
**HUMAN MEDICINE IN A
TECHNOLOGICAL AGE**
Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Fetzer Center
- Nov 2* **Edmund D. Pelligino, M. D.**
MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL ETHICS
Friday, 3:00 p.m., 2010 Friedman
- Nov 8-9* **CONFERENCE: BEYOND DUTY?**
Gregory Mellema, Philosophy,
Calvin College
Caroline Simon, Philosophy,
Hope College
Michael Pritchard, Philosophy,
WMU
Gregory Trianosky, Philosophy,

University of Michigan-Flint
Thursday & Friday, Bernhard Center

Nov 16 **Timothy Shiell**, Department of
Philosophy, W.M.U.

POSITIONAL DUTIES

Friday, 3:00- 5:00 p.m.
204 Bernhard Center

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